

1234
942
py 1



34
2
1

THE CARRANZA DÉBÂCLE

BY

HERBERT INGRAM PRIESTLEY
"
*Associate Professor of Mexican History and
Librarian of the Bancroft Library*

With the Compliments of the Author



[Reprint from the UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA CHRONICLE, July, 1920]

F1234
.P947

Gift
Author
OCT 6 1920

20-22579

THE CARRANZA DÉBÂCLE

HERBERT INGRAM PRIESTLEY

The initial steps in the movement which resulted in the flight and death of President Carranza of Mexico began to be chronicled in the daily press dispatches as early as the end of last March. Weeks before that time some of the details of the proposed revolution were passed about by word of mouth in the United States, the contest in Sonora being freely predicted along the lines which it actually followed. It is thus evident that the waning power of the government had been accurately gauged during the winter, while Obregón was making his political tour of the Republic. During the year 1919 the power of the Carranza régime was apparently at its highest, though that power was never complete nor supported by a large or significant part of the population. It will be remembered that Venustiano Carranza was recognized as *de facto* head of the Republic of Mexico in October, 1915, after he had refused to abide by promises he had made not to assume the presidency, and had quarreled with Francisco Villa and others of his companions in arms against Huerta. Recognition was bestowed, not in full confidence, but in the belief that Carranza led the party which had made the most effective campaign against the disorders prevailing and which was most likely to effect the pacification of the country.

Adequate justification for that recognition would have developed had there come speedy pacification of the disturbed areas, had the power been consolidated on a civil instead of a military basis, and had a reasonable if not a grateful attitude toward the United States been shown. But pacification was unduly retarded by the policy of the military arm, which persisted in treating banditry and rebellion as opportunities for self-enrichment not to be too suddenly ended. Thus the military arm, largely revolution-created to serve as the bulwark of the government, which had but a precarious tenure in the public esteem, became the weakness that worked the downfall of the chief under whose sign manual it pillaged the country.

This military situation was abundant cause for non-fulfilment of many of the promises under which the Carranza revolution was waged. There were many contributing causes in internal affairs. It is true that the program of the revolution was more than amply laid down in the Constitution of 1917, but the Constitution was never really in force and acceptance within the controlled area. Its Utopian provisions for bettering labor conditions were never enacted into law or generally observed under decrees. Its emancipation of the *peón* class was nullified by the condition of semi-warfare which pervaded most areas outside the large cities. The financial condition of the country left much to be desired, although commerce was growing, although tax receipts were higher by one half than they had been in the heyday of the Díaz régime, and although business was conducted almost entirely on a basis of metallic currency. The educational system had been left in the hands of the states and municipalities, even in the Federal District, and only in a few places—notably not in the capital—did it receive adequate financing and attention. Promised improvements in the operation of the courts still left the people “hungering and thirsting for justice”; the jails have been continuously crowded with untried prisoners. The legislative branch broke with the President in so

far as it could. It refused to pass the legislation recommended by the Executive, and withdrew the extraordinary war powers under which Carranza had been exercising dictatorial control. The City of Mexico, given rein as a "free municipality," one of the shibboleths of the revolution, was remiss in police regulations, sanitation, education; administration of justice, and in control of public morals. The President had violated the ballot, imposing his own candidates as governors in numerous states, and had used these gentlemen to further his design to seat his own candidate as his successor, had arrested the partisans of Obregón, and imprisoned, upon flimsy charges, the members of Congress who opposed him.

In external affairs the non-payment of the interest on the national debt, and the observance of a neutrality in the Great War which veiled only too thinly a wish for German success fathered by the thought that a European friend might rise up to check the hegemony of the United States upon the American continent, combined to complicate a difficult situation. Coupled with this mistaken foreign policy were the effects of the attempt at "revindication" of the rights of the nation to the subsoil deposits of petroleum. It would be bootless to discuss here the merits of the oil controversy. The question is open to debate as to what the legal history involved may actually be. But the conflict grew tense when revindication attempted to affect retroactively lands held by foreigners in full titular ownership under the laws of the Díaz régime, which permitted private ownership of subsoil mineral oil. Possibly the new legislation would have left owners in possession and permitted profitable operation of oil properties; but suspicion that the opposite course might be taken, backed by American ideas of the sanctity of contracts, threw the oil producers into an opposition which was extremely embarrassing to the government.

Thus in both internal and external affairs Carranza, instead of addressing himself to righting conditions which

menaced the life of the body politic, undertook to revolutionize the government upon a socialistic theory while a corrupt military oligarchy and a none too honest set of civilian officers vitiated whatever there was good in the new plan by the most cynical grafting.

It is a mistake to think, however, that these attitudes and conditions were entirely new, or entirely chargeable to Carranza. Many of them are inveterate evils which will not disappear suddenly under any government. There had been a perceptible improvement in some of them during Carranza's incumbency, and those who hoped for and believed in the ultimate development of ability by the Mexican people to govern themselves felt that the first great step in improvement would come from the demonstration of stability through peaceable transmission of the presidential power. That was the one great hope of the Carranza régime. In the mind of the President the essential thing was to transmit the power to a man who would continue his own program. He made the fatal mistake of quarreling with the most popular man of his own party, who was ambitious to succeed him, and who had a stronger influence over the military than did the President. If nothing succeeds like success nothing fails like failure to recognize the possibilities, or rather the probabilities, of a situation. Upon Carranza's power to transmit the presidency to a successor who could command the confidence of the faction in control depended the justification of his program. The débâcle, then, was caused by the personal attitude of the President rather than by the many contributory influences which made his tenure so precarious.

The political campaigns of would-be successors have been waged for a year and a half; their acerbity has contributed not a little to the unrest and disorder in the country. Early in January of the present year the well-known fact of Obregón's lead in the race was reiterated by Mr. Gerald Brandon in the *Los Angeles Times* in substantially the following words: "Obregón is the only man

who has defeated Villa. He is a radical, and has fathered several startling attempts to amend the present Constitution, thereby earning the enmity of Carranza. He has practically admitted that he will start a revolution if there is not a fair election. If he does so he will win, as the majority of the military are for him."

About the same time it began to be announced that Ambassador Ignacio Bonillas would presently return from the United States to Mexico to quicken his candidacy, which had the backing of the President, and which had been talked of for six months at least. Almost simultaneously General Pablo González surrendered his command in the south to begin his formal campaign, which had been thought to have Carranza's support before Bonillas was brought forward as a civilian candidate who would free Mexico from her "plague of military men."

Late in January press dispatches said that a force of picked military police had been sent to Mazatlán and Hermosillo in Sonora to fight Yaqui supporters of Obregón, who controlled that state politically. These traditional enemies of whatever central government may exist had been on the warpath several months. Obregón was at the time in Guanajuato, and his interests were being advanced in the United States by General Salvador Alvarado of Yucatecan fame, who had been recently arrested for fomenting social revolution, but who had escaped. On February 11 an assembly of governors in the capital, called by Carranza, issued a declaration that the coming elections would be held peaceably and honestly, they themselves vouching maintenance of law and order. Pablo González issued a manifesto advocating friendly relations with foreign powers, abolition of the military caste, and liberal amnesty laws. Carranza again reiterated his declaration that he would not hold the presidency after expiration of his term, and that if no executive were elected Congress would name one. The Bonillas candidacy began to develop active character.

While all these discordant appeals were being made to the small political element, the country continued in serious disorder, evinced by murder of several Americans and others. In the midst of such conditions it was announced that the American State and War Departments were keenly interested in a report of the arrival at Agua Prieta, in Sonora, of a large force of troops presumably sent to prevent the armed forces of the State from supporting Obregón. These State forces were under Adolfo de la Huerta, the governor, who is a young man of radical tendencies, a follower of Obregón, and now Substitute President of the Republic.

At this juncture, de la Huerta announced that a strike was threatened by the employees of the Southern Pacific de Mexico. This had been predicted a full month before. While Bonillas was being given an apparently enthusiastic welcome in Mexico City on March 22, Obregón and González began to try to harmonize their bitter antagonisms in order to oppose him. Obregón had need of the alliance. By the end of the month General Diéguez stood ready to invade Sonora to seat a new civil governor, C. G. Soriano. The Obregón soldiery was preparing to repel the invasion, as the Sonora group had no will to see their government taken from them in the way Carranza had taken possession of the states of San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, Querétaro, Campeche, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Jalisco, and Vera Cruz.

On April 3 the railway strike began. Carranza threatened to operate the road with soldiers. This was the signal for the officials of Sonora to begin revolution. On the ninth they anticipated Carranza by seizing the railway and operating it with strikers, whose terms were conceded. The State officers next seized the customhouse and post office at Agua Prieta and garrisoned the town. The legislature in an all-night session voted to secede and to constitute the "Republic of Sonora" an independent entity until they were assured that the rights of the State would not be infringed.

At the moment of the uprising Obregón was under technical arrest in Mexico City charged with complicity in revolutionary plans being fomented by one Robert Cejudo. The military operations of the new Republic were placed in charge of General Plutarco Elias Calles, who had recently resigned from the national cabinet to enter the campaign for Obregón. His immediate task was to repel invasion by Diéguez, who was expected to advance from Chihuahua by way of Pulpito Pass. But the Chihuahua forces, after having been denied railway transportation from El Paso to Douglas, refused to advance. The attempt of Carranza to deal with the revolution from the eastern side was thus rendered futile.

In the meantime Governor Iturbe to the south in Sinaloa announced that he was "still loyal"—he should have been, for he had become a multimillionaire by virtue of his governorship—but neutral between Mexico and Sonora. He was looking for a safe place to fall. The troops of Sonora now began to advance upon the Sinaloa border in order to bring that State into open revolt and control the coast. They "took" Culiacán on April 17 and pressed on to Mazatlán and Tepic. By April 15 Obregón had escaped from the capital in disguise—with General Benjamín Hill and had made his way to the southwest. He was said to have established wireless communication whereby to direct the revolution. On April 18 the State of Nayarit indorsed the Sonora movement; all the interior towns of Sonora adhered to the *cuartelazo* of Agua Prieta, and practically all the Yaqui and the Mayo Indians of the regions did so as well. Michoacán to the south soon joined in defection; in Chihuahua numerous army officers cast their contemplated lot with the rapidly growing movement to change the national leader. On April 21 Benjamín Hill, the "original Obregonista," was said to have advanced to Conterras, on the outskirts of the capital, with troops from Guerrero. Zacatecas was confessedly in rebel hands. Tuxpam in the oil regions was threatened, troops at

Linares revolted, and Mexico City was cut off from communication.

The Liberal Constitutionalist Party thereupon made a demand that Carranza should relinquish his office, and, under declarations contained in the "Plan de Agua Prieta," set up Adolfo de la Huerta as supreme commander until such time as the states joining Sonora should make a choice. A provisional president was to be named as soon as the Plan should be adopted by the Liberal Constitutionalist Army. The Plan announced a policy of protection to all citizens and foreigners and the enforcement of all their legal rights. Especially was emphasized a determination to develop industries, commerce, and business in general. Finally, the antiphonal strophe habitual in the Mexican system of government by *cuartelazo* was added: "Effectual suffrage, no re-election."

The legal government continued to camouflage the situation by absurd claims of strength, but its position was serious. The effort to send troops into the north failed, and Governor Iturbe of Sinaloa threatened to evacuate that State and Nayarit unless he could be reinforced. Obregón was nearly ready to advance from Guerrero to the capital; more than 50,000 troops had joined the prospering cause.

On the last day of the month Washington received dispatches saying that Carranza was planning to leave the capital, but at the same time it was known that Pablo González had cut rail communication with Vera Cruz. He had recently been obliged by Carranza to withdraw his candidacy in order to compel Obregón to follow suit, it was claimed. This may have influenced González to assist the *cuartelazo*. He had left Mexico City on a feigned errand, and, once safely outside, had revolted with numerous subordinates on May 3. A rumor spread that Carranza's remaining generals, summoned to advise him, had recommended that he resign not later than May 15. The enemy now numbered twice the total of the government forces.

On May 5 President Carranza issued his last manifesto. He declared that he would fight to the finish, that he would

not resign, nor turn the power over to anyone not his duly elected successor; he said:

I must declare that I consider it one of the highest duties which devolve upon me to set down affirmed and established the principle that in future the public power shall not be the prize of military chiefs whose revolutionary merits, however great, may serve to excuse future acts of ambition. I consider that it is essential for the independence and sovereignty of Mexico that the transmission of power shall always be effected peacefully and by democratic procedure, that the *cuartelazo* as a means of ascent to power shall forever be abolished entirely from our political practices. And I consider, finally, that the principle must be kept inviolate which was adopted by the Constitution of 1917, that no man shall rule over the destinies of the nation who has tried to climb to power by means of insubordination, the *cuartelazo*, or treason.

While this declaration was being penned, and was being given to the press by Luis Cabrera, the man who above all others is responsible for the unpopularity and the mistaken attitudes of Carranza, the exodus had been planned, and was immediately put into execution.

It was an exodus, not a flight. Professor J. H. Smith has said of the departure of President Herrera from Mexico during the stormy days of the Mexican War, that he "left the palace with the entire body of his loyal officers and officials, his mild face and his respectable side-whiskers—in one hired cab." Had Carranza limited his contingent to those who were genuinely loyal a cab might have sufficed. The proposal was to transfer the government to Vera Cruz, whence so many hard-pressed forlorn hopes have been able to "come back." Twenty-one trains, collected and equipped at great effort, were to carry away 20,000 troops, carloads of records, and millions of treasure. The dispatches said 27,000,000 pesos were taken, but, after the disaster, Pastor Rouaix, ex-secretary of agriculture, upon returning to Mexico on May 18 with the booty, said that it was worth 100,000,000 pesos. In addition to the troops, there was a carload of employees of state, the Cabinet, the Supreme Court, and the Permanent Commission of Congress.

Misfortune attended every step. There was delay and confusion in getting off. Attacks on the convoy began almost at once. Before they passed La Villa the last four trains were cut off. Tools for tearing up the track in the rear had been left behind during the first attack, and a wild engine, driven against the fugitives' last train, wrecked artillery and aviation equipment, and killed or wounded railway employees. After delay at Apizaco on May 8 and 9, the loyal forces went on to San Marcos. Beyond that place they engaged revolutionary troops, taking four hundred prisoners. On May 12 they reached Rinconada, where they learned that General Guadalupe Sánchez had gone over to Obregón, deserting General Cándido Aguilar, the President's son-in-law, and that there was no longer hope of a stand at Orizaba, where Aguilar was to hold the ways, for he, deserted, had fled.

Finally, after his trains were useless, and his forces had been defeated at Aljibes, Carranza, maintaining imperturbable *sangfroid*, gave up hope of escape by rail and set out for the Puebla mountains, trusting perhaps in the aid of the Cabrera family, which was strong in the region.

While making his way northeastward, presumably toward some small gulf port, he was betrayed by one Herrero, a "*general de dedo*" of sufficient obscurity to suggest that he might have been someone's agent. The President was done to death while he slept with his dwindled retinue in a mountain shack at Tlaxcalantongo, in the State of Puebla.

Thus far bloodshed had been insignificant. Obregón, who had entered the City of Mexico unresisted on May 8, had sent flying columns to capture Carranza, issuing repeated orders that he was not to be injured, and endeavoring to induce him to surrender upon reiterated assurances of personal guaranties. All overtures had been spurned. It was evidently the intention to spare his life. The considerations of humanity, of old associations, even of recognition itself, demanded this. The pig-headed country gentleman, who was unsuccessful at managing the mature men of

his organization, knew how to play his last card so as to diminish his opponents' profit to the minimum. Obregón's tart reply to the telegram sent by some thirty followers of Carranza announcing the final disaster, was evidently addressed as much to the public of Mexico and of the United States as to the remnant of the lost cause. The revolutionary party has taken energetic means to demonstrate its non-complicity in the deed.

Most of the official family which remained with the *Primer Jefe* to the end were imprisoned for a time in Mexico City, but nearly all have now been released. General Juan Barragán, the youngster under thirty who was the military genius of the last régime, escaped, and fled across the border.

The body of Carranza was brought back to Mexico City on May 24 after an investigation, partly financed by Obregón personally, which disproved the claim of Herrero that the President had committed suicide. He was buried in the cemetery of Dolores, according to his known desire. Mexico gave itself up to uniform manifestations of regret and respect. It was anticipated for a time that the revolution of feeling would develop into armed opposition to the revolution; there have been armed clashes in the north, and a rebel named Osuna is still in the field, but his forces are small and he has already met some defeats. None of the rebel activity has the purpose of vindicating Carranza.

On May 25 Adolfo de la Huerta was made Substitute President by the reassembled Congress. He is to serve the unexpired term of Carranza, that is, until the end of December. He is one of the young men of the north, an active revolutionist for years. He has been a decided radical, interesting himself in labor legislation, and has announced his interest in the proletariat even since his raise to the presidency. His friends say that his ideas have been tempered by the acquisition of power, and that he has renounced his inveterate animosity toward capital. He has recently been a devoted follower of Obregón, who is said

to be "obeying" the new régime from private offices in Mexico City. Several members of the new cabinet are fairly well known to the American public. The Minister of War is General Plutarco Elias Calles, who was for a time in Carranza's cabinet as Secretary of Commerce and Industry; the latter position is now held by Alberto Pani. The treasury has been intermittently in charge of General Salvador Alvarado, whose career in Yucatan as an independent Socialist governor, and later as an opponent of Carranza and supporter of Obregón, has made him well known. It is said that his connection with the Obregón government will be transitory. That may well be, for he is an individualist like Obregón; but he may not willingly subside. The ministry of Communications and Public Works has been entrusted to General Ortiz Rubio, that of Agriculture and Fomento to General Enrique Estrada, while the name of General Jacinto B. Treviño has been connected with various cabinet positions, as have those of Antonio Villareal, Morales Hesse, Santiago Martínez Alomía, and others. Foreign relations have been committed to Miguel Covarrubias, who has had a diplomatic career of some forty years. Representation of the new government at Washington is in the hands of Fernando Iglesias Calderón. Felix F. Palavicini, old war horse of the early revolution, editor of *El Universal*, a strong *aliadófilo* during the Great War, and capable publicist who habitually finds himself on the winning side of affairs, has been given a mission before numerous courts of the Old World. The legations at Madrid and Mexico have been raised to the rank of embassies, and the choice of ministers is now being made. The new rector of the University of Mexico is Lic. José Vazconcelos, well-known educator and littérateur. It seems likely that the educational system will become organized under federal control, which will place it in better position than it ever has been. Effort is being made to obtain a small number of American teachers.

Public opinion in Mexico has received the new order with optimism. Among Americans it is looked upon as a reorganization of the power within the group which Carranza himself led, but the sentiment is frequently voiced that "anything is better than Carranza." The change will develop rather in personal attitudes than in declared principles of government. The men who lead the new movement have been known by word and deed as pronounced radicals. The swing of the pendulum has been steadily toward more radical idealism ever since Independence. It has been noticeable, however, that in all cases of actual acquisition of power radicalism has been left in the stage of theory, and pronounced materialistic conservatism, for the benefit of those who govern, has usually eventuated.

In the United States the Obregón movement has been received with favorable comment in circles in which Mexican business interests are important. The leading article in the May number of *The Americas*, published by the National City Bank of New York, says in part:

Now that events in Mexico are moving toward final settlement, there is every reason to believe that the plans repeatedly made and postponed may be put into execution, and trade relations established between the business men of this country and the merchants of Mexico that will be permanent and profitable to both groups. . . . In spite of troubles that may come during the next few months and outward appearances that make it appear that Mexico is merely keeping up its favorite pastime of revolution and civil war, there is sound reason for believing that constructive influences are at work and that a happier and more prosperous epoch is nearly at hand.

It would be futile to expect that mere change of leadership from one coterie to another within a small fraction of the politically significant element of the population will work an immediate miracle. There is still a period of anxiety to pass through. The congressional elections have been set for the first Sunday in August, and the presidential election for September. Most of the governors have been changed and the municipalities reorganized, with Obre-

gonistas in place, hence the machinery is well arranged for peaceable elections. Obregón is given a fair field by the definite renunciation of González. If the old conservative element put forward a candidate, the action will be merely nominal, though the problem of Villa and his old defenders of the Constitution of 1857 still continues to perplex the new government.

The entire situation cannot be predicated on the personality of Obregón, however. The new Congress will be potent in capacity to promote discord, as was the old. The new official class as a whole is new and untried. When such difficult problems as the oil controversy come before Congress there will be great divergence of opinion. The oil men have asked to have the Carranza decrees annulled and the program of legislation definitely settled. Among the Mexicans there is no unanimity concerning annulment of the decrees or solutions of numerous problems raised by Article 27 of the Constitution. President Huerta's recent favorable decrees are of course only temporary in their effect.

There is a general disposition on the part of many foreign powers to consider the new provisional government as the legal successor of the old one, and the question of recognition is assumedly not to be raised, at least as far as actual practice is concerned. The Mexican papers express confidence that the United States will announce recognition at an early date. They indicate surprise at the proposals contained in the report of Senator Fall's committee, and it is not to be expected that acquiescence in all the provisions of that report would be forthcoming without irritation.

Furthermore, it is to be borne in mind that solution of the international problem lies not alone in readjustment of material contracts. Prosperity, successful commerce, increased wages, elevated standards of living, all proved ineffectual to satisfy a newly developed industrial middle class which rose during the Díaz régime. The magical prosperity of the past year has not made the nation peaceful

or happy, for below the prosperous classes exists the mass of the Indian population, untouched by the wave of political change that has gone over its head, unhelped by promises unkept, uninterested in its own elevation. If genuine peace has come, if material prosperity is assured, now must begin a long earnest effort for the establishment of justice and for the development of an adequate system of moral and social education, an effort which may result in the amalgamation of the peoples of Mexico into a national unity.







0 015 991 359 4 •